

ADDRESSING THE INCREASE OF GUN VIOLENCE RELATED DEATHS IN THE  
UNITED STATES AND HOW TO REDUCE THEM

by  
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## **Abstract**

Several Americans lose their lives to gun violence every year. Gun-violence-related death rates have been increasing annually. In 2020, gun violence deaths significantly increased due to the insecurities surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial tensions in the United States. This capstone highlights the gravity of the issue of increased gun-violence-related deaths in America and discusses the history of gun laws in the US as well as the current gun laws. The effectiveness and ineffectiveness of current policies are examined based on the states they are applicable in. The data is compared to propose a policy that would possibly help decrease gun-related deaths in the US by encouraging gun permits that would be acquired after intensive background checks and psychological assessments. The proposal presents an action-forcing event, the history and background of gun laws, a policy proposal, a policy and political analysis of the policy, and a recommendation. Essentially, the recommendation is that the policy proposed should be implemented to see a decline in gun-violence deaths in the United States.

**Capstone Advisor:** Dr. Paul J. Weinstein, Jr.

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**To:** Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, House Committee on Oversight and Reform  
**From:** Rameesha S. Ashfaq  
**Subject:** Exponential Rise in Gun Violence Deaths in 2020

### **Action Forcing Event**

In the first week of January, the Gun Violence Archive released data recording at least 19,223 homicidal deaths due to gun violence in 2020 — approximately a 25% increase from 2019<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, homicides rose by 30% in 2020 — 39% of them were linked to gun violence<sup>2</sup> which has been a persistent issue in the United States due to the easy accessibility to guns<sup>3</sup>.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The US gun homicide rate is 25% higher in comparison to other affluent countries and gun-related suicide is eight times higher than other countries.<sup>4</sup> Although gun death rates have decreased in other affluent countries in recent years, the rates in the US have only increased.<sup>5</sup> The US had made it easy for Americans to purchase guns without proper background checks — due to which there is easy accessibility of guns and more gun violence which has resulted in

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<sup>1</sup> Gun Violence Archive, “Gun Violence Archive 2020”. February 2021. Accessed: February 3, 2021: <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls>

<sup>2</sup> Jackman, Tory. “Homicides rose 30 percent in 2020, survey of 34 U.S. cities finds.” *The Washington Post*. February 3, 2021. Accessed: February 3, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/crime-law/2021/02/03/homicides-rose-2020/>

<sup>3</sup> National Public Radio, “2020 Was A Record-Breaking Year For Gun-Related Deaths In The U.S”. January 3 2021. Accessed: February 3, 2021: <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/03/952969760/2020-was-a-record-breaking-year-for-gun-related-deaths-in-the-u-s>

<sup>4</sup> Hemenway, David. “Off the Cuff: What don’t we know about the causes of gun violence? Almost everything.” *Harvard Public Health*. Accessed: February 15, 2021: [https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine\\_article/off-the-cuff-what-dont-we-know-about-the-causes-of-gun-violence-almost-everything/](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/off-the-cuff-what-dont-we-know-about-the-causes-of-gun-violence-almost-everything/)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

thousands of people losing their lives to guns.<sup>6</sup> According to the global Small Arms Survey of 2018, there were 393 million civilian-owned firearms in the US, which equals 120.5 guns for every 100 residents in the US — meaning that there are more guns than people in the US.<sup>7</sup> Most of the guns in the United States are owned by white men and approximately one-third of over-50s said that they owned a gun.<sup>8</sup>

More than 41,500 people died due to gun violence in 2020, out of which 23,000 people died by suicide; this is the highest number of annual firearm deaths it has been in the past twenty years.<sup>9</sup> The rise in gun violence has significantly impacted black and brown communities from lower socio-economic statuses, whereby black Americans make up for 68% of the homicide victims in larger cities and many of them are victims of gun violence.<sup>10</sup> With the presence of guns at home, women are more at risk of being murdered as women are usually murdered in the home and almost always by a man's gun.<sup>11</sup> Killings of police have also been due to the widespread gun availability as police officers are more likely to be shot and killed in households

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<sup>6</sup> Amnesty International, "Gun Violence — Key Facts." Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/arms-control/gun-violence/>

<sup>7</sup> Ingraham, Christopher, "There are more guns than people in the United States, according to a new study of global firearm ownership." The Washington Post. June 19, 2018. Accessed: April 19, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2018/06/19/there-are-more-guns-than-people-in-the-united-states-according-to-a-new-study-of-global-firearm-ownership/>

<sup>8</sup> Gramlich, John, and Schaeffer, Katherine., "7 facts about guns in the U.S." *Pew Research*. October 22, 2019. Accessed: April 19, 2021: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/22/facts-about-guns-in-united-states/>

<sup>9</sup> Hauch, Grace. "They're not forgotten: America's other epidemic killed 41,000 people this year." *USA Today*. December 18, 2020. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/12/18/gun-violence-deaths-americans-2020/3906428001/>

<sup>10</sup> Bates, Josiah. "2020 Will End as One of America's Most Violent Years in Decades." *TIME*. December 30, 2020. Accessed February 15, 2021: <https://time.com/5922082/2020-gun-violence-homicides-record-year/>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

that have guns rather than the ones that do not.<sup>12</sup> Essentially, gun violence has significantly impacted the safety of minorities across the United States.<sup>13</sup>

The sizeable amount of guns currently in circulation is a leading cause of suicide as firearm suicides account for more than half of the suicides in the US.<sup>14</sup> There is a notable link between firearm ownership and suicide. In a study done by the Harvard School of Public Health, it was noted that the states where more guns were prevalent, the rates of suicide were higher — for example, in Wyoming, 63 percent of homes reported owning firearms and suicide rates were higher too.<sup>15</sup> The increasing accessibility of guns has made it easy for just about anyone to purchase a gun, even if they are mentally unstable or have a history of mental illnesses. If not through federally licensed firearm dealers, people can easily purchase them from unlicensed sellers in different settings such as gun shows, flea markets, the internet, dealers.<sup>16</sup>

Guns being easily accessible to individuals in the United States has led to an increase in gun violence, especially during unprecedented times in 2020.<sup>17</sup> While the Second Amendment grants the right to bear guns, it has led to the misuse of guns which has resulted in several gun

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<sup>12</sup> Hemenway, David. “Off the Cuff: What don’t we know about the causes of gun violence? Almost everything.” *Harvard Public Health*. Accessed: February 15, 2021:

[https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine\\_article/off-the-cuff-what-dont-we-know-about-the-causes-of-gun-violence-almost-everything/](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/magazine/magazine_article/off-the-cuff-what-dont-we-know-about-the-causes-of-gun-violence-almost-everything/)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Kiewra, Karin. “Guns and suicide: A fatal link.” *Harvard Public Health*. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/magazine/guns-and-suicide/>

<sup>16</sup> Sorenson, Susan., and Webster, Daniel.”Gun Violence: Prediction, Prevention, and Policy.” *American Psychological Association*. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/gun-violence-prevention>

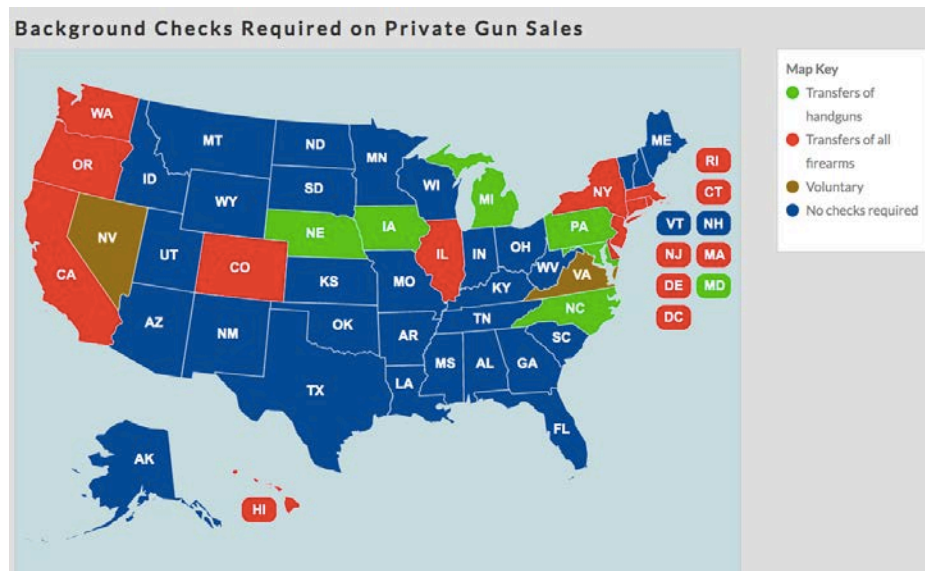
<sup>17</sup> Hauch, Grace. “‘They’re not forgotten’: America’s other epidemic killed 41,000 people this year.” *USA Today*. December 18, 2020. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/12/18/gun-violence-deaths-americans-2020/3906428001/>

violence-related deaths over the years.<sup>18</sup> Although some states require individuals to obtain a permit before they purchase a gun, 31 states do not.<sup>19</sup> Some states do not even require an in-depth background check, or none at all if purchasing a gun from a private seller.<sup>20</sup> The map

below

the states

require



shows

that

background checks on private sales.

<sup>18</sup> Olsen, Henry. Opinion: Why not try to amend the Second Amendment?. The Washington Post, June 3, 2019, Accessed: March 16, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/06/03/why-not-try-amend-second-amendment/>

<sup>19</sup> Sauter, Michael, and Frohlich, Thomas. States where anyone can carry concealed weapons. *USA Today*, July 17, 2019, Accessed: March 16, 2021: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2016/07/17/guns-concealed-weapons-states/86181778/>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



### *Figure A — Background Checks Required on Private Gun Sales Across the US21*

Vulnerable people or those who are not psychologically fit to have guns can obtain access to guns and harm themselves or those around them in the United States.<sup>22</sup> In 2017, it was estimated that every 15 minutes a person in the United States is shot to death, and since then the numbers are only rising.<sup>23</sup> Gun sales increased by 40% in the US in 2020 and by 60% in January 2021, thus causing the deaths caused by guns to rise significantly as well.<sup>24</sup> With the impacts of COVID-19 on mental health and the strong emotions that came with racial tensions in the US during 2020, gun violence increased and has the possibility to get worse.<sup>25</sup>

## **History and Background**

Founded in 1871, the National Rifle Association (NRA) was formed with the primary goal to “promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis.”<sup>26</sup> It was created to increase military preparedness in the US and to help Americans develop top-notch shooting skills.<sup>27</sup> After decades of supporting regulation of guns in the US, the NRA shifted its focus after the second

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<sup>21</sup> Guns to Carry. CCW Map Library. Accessed: April 19, 2021, <https://www.gunstocarry.com/ccw-map-library/>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Vargas, Eugenio. Gun Violence in America: A State-by-State Analysis. *Centre for American Progress*. November 20, 2019. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/news/2019/11/20/477218/gun-violence-america-state-state-analysis/>

<sup>24</sup> McIntyre, Douglas, “Guns in America: Nearly 40 million guns were purchased legally in 2020 and another 4.1 million bought in January.” *USA Today*, February 10, 2021, Accessed April 19, 2021: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2021/02/10/this-is-how-many-guns-were-sold-in-all-50-states/43371461/>

<sup>25</sup> Hughes, Devin. “Opinion: 2020 is shattering gun violence records. We must act.” *The Washington Post*. July 21, 2020. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/21/2020-is-shattering-gun-violence-records-we-must-act/>

<sup>26</sup> NRA. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NRA. Accessed: February 28, 2021: <https://home.nra.org/about-the-nra/>

<sup>27</sup> Reese, Hope. How the NRA went from a marksmanship group to a controversial political powerhouse. *VOX*. April 2 2020. Accessed: February 28, 2021: <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2020/3/24/21191524/nra-national-rifle-association-history-frank-smyth-wayne-la-pierre>

federal gun law in 1968.<sup>28</sup> It not only became an organization of secrecy, but the motives of the NRA changed to an organization that supports gun rights and encourages gun ownership.<sup>29</sup> By investing financially in gun rights advocacy and lobbying for easy accessibility of guns, the NRA has encouraged several gun rights advocates to push for stronger gun rights and to reject gun control laws.<sup>30</sup>

Over the years, the NRA spent millions of dollars on lobbying Congress against laws that would enact some sort of gun control — such as stricter background checks or permits to obtain guns — which have made an impact on making guns more accessible to the public.<sup>31</sup> Due to the easy accessibility of guns, mass shootings have risen throughout the years.<sup>32</sup> One of the most significant mass shootings occurred on February 14th, 1929, which was a gang-related shooting during Al Capone’s gang rule in Chicago, known as the “St Valentine’s Day Massacre.”<sup>33</sup> The gun violence occurred between the North Side Gang and South Side Gang and resulted in the death of seven members of the North Side Gang through the use of machine guns.<sup>34</sup> Although much deadlier mass shootings occur today, in 1929, this act of gun violence was significant

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<sup>28</sup> Smyth, Frank. *The NRA: The Unauthorized History*. Accessed: February 28, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Erickson, Amanda. How the NRA has shaped the world’s gun laws. *The Washington Post*. March 14, 2018. Accessed: February 28, 2021: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/03/14/how-the-nra-has-shaped-the-worlds-gun-laws/>

<sup>31</sup> Schwarts, Brian. NRA spent \$1.6 million lobbying against background check expansion laws in months leading up to latest mass shootings. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/05/nra-spent-1point6-million-lobbying-against-expanded-background-check-laws.html>

<sup>32</sup> <https://efsgv.org/learn/type-of-gun-violence/mass-shootings/>

<sup>33</sup> HISTORY, “St. Valentine’s Day Massacre.” November 9, 2009. Accessed: March 1, 2021: <https://www.history.com/topics/crime/saint-valentines-day-massacre>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

enough to be called a massacre and to bring the first federal gun control law into existence — the National Firearms Act of 1934.<sup>35</sup>

The National Firearms Act (NFA) of 1934 was passed in Congress when President Roosevelt held office; it required the registration of all NFA firearms — including shotguns, machine guns, and rifles — and a \$200 tax was imposed on them.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, the NRA was concerned the Congress was going too far; NRA Executive Vice President Milton Reckord had warned against legislating "15 million sportsmen into criminals" and believed that a gun is essentially only dangerous when it is in the hands of a criminal and not in the hands of an honest citizen.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the final law exempted handguns and "sporting firearms", just as the NRA wanted.<sup>38</sup> This created a loophole in the NFA as individuals did not have to register handguns and sporting arms nor did they have to pay any taxes for them. The NFA has had some alterations in 1938 and required the licensing of interstate gun dealers who had to record their sales and also prohibited sales to people who were under indictment or convicted of violent crimes.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Schwartz, A. How the St. Valentine's Day Massacre Changed Gun Laws. *NY Times*. February 16, 2018. Accessed: March 1st, 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/opinion/how-the-st-valentines-day-massacre-changed-gun-laws.html>

<sup>36</sup> Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives: ATF. National Firearms Act. Accessed: March 1, 2021: <https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/national-firearms-act>

<sup>37</sup> Tampa Bay Times. Capone, Dillinger and Tommy guns: Today's debate reminds of 1934. March 15, 2018. Accessed: March 1, 2021: [https://www.tampabay.com/news/nation/Capone-Dillinger-and-Tommy-guns-Today-s-debate-reminds-of-1934\\_166402972/](https://www.tampabay.com/news/nation/Capone-Dillinger-and-Tommy-guns-Today-s-debate-reminds-of-1934_166402972/)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Washington Post. History of gun-control legislation. Accessed: March 1, 2021: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/history-of-gun-control-legislation/2012/12/22/80c8d624-4ad3-11e2-9a42-d1ce6d0ed278\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/history-of-gun-control-legislation/2012/12/22/80c8d624-4ad3-11e2-9a42-d1ce6d0ed278_story.html)

Although the NFA of 1934 and 1938 required rifles to be registered and taxed, two of the most significant assassinations of American history occurred after it, including the assassination of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr, which were carried out using rifles.<sup>40</sup> The need for reform in the gun acquisition laws was being considered in 1963 following John F. Kennedy's assassination and was further pushed in 1968 after Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated in April 1968 and Robert Kennedy was assassinated in June 1968.<sup>41</sup> The Gun Control Act (GCA) of 1968 included changes such as raising the age to purchase handguns to 21, banning interstate shipments of firearms to private individuals, sales of firearms to individuals with mental illnesses, drug addicts, and minors, as well as strengthening records of gun dealers and licensing.<sup>42</sup> Some of these changes were significant and ensured a certain level of scrutiny for gun dealers and restrictions of gun acquisition for certain people.<sup>43</sup> The NRA had opposed the proposed reforms of gun control laws since they were proposed in 1965 and showed dismissal of the GCA of 1968 as well because they believe there is no such thing as reasonable gun control legislation.<sup>44</sup>

In 1986, after significant opposition and complaints of the federal government abusing its power to enforce gun control laws, Congress passed the Firearm Owners Protection Act (FOPA)

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<sup>40</sup> Waxman, Olivia. How the Gun Control Act of 1968 Changed America's Approach to Firearms—And What People Get Wrong About That History. October 13, 2018. Accessed: March 1, 2021: <https://time.com/5429002/gun-control-act-history-1968/>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Vizzard, William J. (1999). "The Gun Control Act of 1968," Saint Louis University Public Law Review: Vol. 18 : No. 1 , Article 7.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

of 1986 which relaxed gun laws.<sup>45</sup> The FOPA was passed with the significant efforts and influence of the NRA to force a bill onto the floor of a Democratic-controlled House and was later approved and signed by the NRA's endorsed president, Ronald Reagan.<sup>46</sup> Essentially, the FOPA was passed to roll back the GCA of 1968.<sup>47</sup> The Act revised previous laws and allowed gun dealers to sell firearms at a location other than the address provided on their license, it removed the requirement of gun dealers to keep a record of their gun sales and further prevented the federal government from maintaining a record of gun dealers, and limited the number of compliance inspections ATF could perform without a warrant.<sup>48</sup> After the FOPA was enacted, gun-related homicide rates increased significantly, especially among the youth.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in the 1990s, a study of 1530 federal firearm trafficking showed that corrupt licensed dealers were the leading providers of guns that were given to criminals.<sup>50</sup>

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan survived an assassination where he was shot in his left lung and his press secretary, Brady, was also shot in the head and recovered.<sup>51</sup> After his recovery, Brady started advocating for gun-control laws and legislation and was able to get his bill proposal introduced to Congress.<sup>52</sup> In 1993, with the support of Bill Clinton, the Brady Law

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<sup>45</sup> The Washington Post. History of gun-control legislation. Accessed: March 1, 2021:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/history-of-gun-control-legislation/2012/12/22/80c8d624-4ad3-11e2-9a42-d1ce6d0ed278\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/history-of-gun-control-legislation/2012/12/22/80c8d624-4ad3-11e2-9a42-d1ce6d0ed278_story.html)

<sup>46</sup> Welna, David. The Decades-Old Gun Ban That's Still On The Books. *NPR*. January 16, 2013. Accessed: March 1, 2021: <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2013/01/18/169526687/the-decades-old-gun-ban-thats-still-on-the-books>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Firearms Owners' Protection Act, Public Law 308, 99 Cong., 2 sess. (May 19, 1986), Accessed March 1, 2021: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg449.pdf#page=1>

<sup>49</sup> Cork Daniel. 1999. Examining time-space interaction in city-level homicide data: crack markets and the diffusion of guns to youth. *J. Quant. Criminol.* 15:379–406.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Bur. Alcohol, Tob. Firearms. (2000). Following the Gun: Enforcing Federal Laws Against Firearms Trafficking. Washington, DC: U.S. Dep. Treas.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

was passed; the law requires an unlicensed handgun buyer to wait five days before a licensed seller can hand the gun over to them, during which a background check is done.<sup>53</sup> Essentially, it included background checks for unlicensed buyers which were not included in the FOPA, however, not many changes were made and it was rather like a small act.<sup>54</sup> In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed and passed the Federal Assaults Weapon Ban which was under the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994; the ban prohibited 19 models of assault weapons.<sup>55</sup> This ban was enacted due to the mass shooting at Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, California in 1989, which resulted in the death of 5 children and 29 were injured.<sup>56</sup> The ban lasted only for 10 years, as it expired in 2004 was not renewed, partly due to NRA's vigorous lobbying and influence.<sup>57</sup> The expiration of this ban meant that firearms such as AK-47s, TEC-9s, and Uzis could be bought legally which worked in the favour of gun rights advocates and owners.<sup>58</sup> From 1900 to 2004, there were 118 mass shootings which make 1.13 mass shootings a year.<sup>59</sup> However, from, 2004 to 2013 alone, there were 28 mass shooting events which equaled an average of 3.5 shootings yearly, statistically proving that since the expiration of the Assaults Weapons Ban, the mass shootings increased by over 200 percent.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> ATF. "Brady Law." July 2, 2019. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://www.atf.gov/rules-and-regulations/brady-law>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Gerney, Arkadi., and Parsons, Chelsea. Assault Weapons Revisited Policy Options for Regulating Rifles, Shotguns, and Other Firearms 20 Years After the Passage of the Assault Weapons Ban. (September 2014). Centre for American Progress. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/AssaultWeapons-report.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> NBC. Congress lets assault weapons ban expire. September 8, 2004. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna5946127>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Kessler, Glenn. Bill Clinton's over-the-top 'fact' on mass shootings. *The Washington Post*. January 11, 2013. Accessed: March 2, 2021: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/bill-clintons-over-the-top-fact-on-mass-shootings/2013/01/10/7040d61e-5b7a-11e2-9fa9-5fbdc9530eb9\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/post/bill-clintons-over-the-top-fact-on-mass-shootings/2013/01/10/7040d61e-5b7a-11e2-9fa9-5fbdc9530eb9_blog.html)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

To protect the gun industry manufacturers from being sued or held liable and to curb the financial effect of the litigation crisis the gun industry was facing, President George W. Bush enacted the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act and Child Safety Lock Act of 2005.<sup>61</sup> It granted immunity to the firearm manufacturers so that they could not be sued by the family of a victim who died due to gun violence and ensured that all handguns were to be sold in secure gun storage.<sup>62</sup> The NRA considered the enactment of PLCAA as a monumental victory as it would help save the American firearms industry.<sup>63</sup> It certainly increased the accessibility and availability of guns as there was little accountability for the gun manufacturers, and thus, it resulted in the ready supply of guns provided to criminals which were used to commit crimes.<sup>64</sup>

On April 16th, 2007, a Virginia Tech senior, with a record of mental illness, entered the campus armed with two semi-automatic handguns he bought legally.<sup>65</sup> In 10 minutes, he shot students and faculty members and killed 32 people, including himself, whereas 17 were wounded.<sup>66</sup> Being one of the deadliest school shootings, this incident sparked debates over gun control and the flawed system that allowed legal gun acquisition to an individual with a record of mental illness, despite background checks.<sup>67</sup> In response, Congress passed the first significant change to American firearm laws in more than a decade, which expanded the federal background

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<sup>61</sup> Chu, Vivian. The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act: An Overview of Limiting Tort Liability of Gun Manufacturers. *Congressional Research Service*, 7-5700. (2012): 1-11.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Crow, Alden. Shooting Blanks: The Ineffectiveness of the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act. *SMU Law Review*, 59-4 (2006): 1813-1839.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> CNN. Virginia Tech Shootings Fast Facts. April 9, 2020. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://www.cnn.com/2013/10/31/us/virginia-tech-shootings-fast-facts>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Jervis, Rick. 10 years after Va. Tech shooting: How gun laws have changed. *USA Today*. April 17, 2017. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/04/14/va-tech-shooting-gun-laws-debate/100458024/>

check so that it includes millions of more people, specifically criminals and those with mental illnesses.<sup>68</sup> However, there was still significant opposition from gun rights lobbyists to loosen gun laws.<sup>69</sup>

Since 2008, there have not been any significant amendments or new bills that impact federal gun laws.<sup>70</sup> During President Obama's office, several gun control policies were proposed and were also taken into effect, and yet none of them significantly impacted the existing federal gun laws.<sup>71</sup> State-level regulations have been implemented, for example, in 2011 in Alabama, it was illegal for an individual to buy a weapon for someone else who does not have permission to acquire one legally.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, there is a lack of uniformity of gun control laws federally to prevent the easy accessibility of guns. Between 2009 and 2018, mass shootings increased significantly from the previous decade; in those shootings, 1 in 3 of the mass shooters illegally acquired firearms due to poor background checks.<sup>73</sup> In March 2020 alone, 2 million guns were sold due to the fear of civil unrest caused by the pandemic and racial tensions in the US.<sup>74</sup> The increase in gun sales and easy accessibility of guns resulted in a 25% increase in gun violence deaths in 2020 in comparison to 2019.<sup>75</sup> As portrayed by the research and policies implemented

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> ProCon. History of Gun Control. February 1, 2021. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://gun-control.procon.org/history-of-gun-control/>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Sapient, Joaquin. Mass Shootings Do Little to Change State Gun Laws. ProPublica. January 3, 2013. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://www.propublica.org/article/mass-shootings-do-little-to-change-state-gun-laws>

<sup>73</sup> Everytown Research & Policy. Ten Years of Mass Shootings in the United States. November 21, 2019. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://maps.everytownresearch.org/massshootingsreports/mass-shootings-in-america-2009-2019/>

<sup>74</sup> Collins, Keith., and Yaffe-Bellany, David. About 2 Million Guns Were Sold in the U.S. as Virus Fears Spread. *NY Times*. April 1, 2020. Accessed: March 2, 2021: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/04/01/business/coronavirus-gun-sales.html>

<sup>75</sup> Gun Violence Archive, "Gun Violence Archive 2020". February 2021. Accessed: February 3, 2021: <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/past-tolls>



over time, it can be noted that there have not been significant gun control laws to prevent the accessibility of guns which cause gun violence incidents such as mass shootings and homicides. The current policies are not strong enough to prevent the rise in deaths due to gun violence.

Over the years, there has been an increase in support for gun control, especially among eighteen to twenty-nine-year-olds and the ownership for guns is also lower for young adults.<sup>76</sup> However, due to the strong influence of the NRA on the US Congress, these gun control laws get pushed back. The NRA spends \$250 million per year, and out of that, they spend \$3 million on lobbying to influence gun policy and ensure strong gun control policies are not adopted.<sup>77</sup> The NRA believes that the increase in gun acquisition makes the country safer as people can use them for self-defence to ensure their safety.<sup>78</sup> However, as statistics suggest, that has done more harm than good.

## **Policy Proposal**

The goal of the recommended policy is to reduce gun violence deaths from the 2020 levels. It aims to protect the lives of Americans, especially those susceptible to gun violence while also protecting the Second Amendment. The purpose is to make guns less accessible to just about anyone and to reduce homicides caused by gun violence. The success of the policy, once implemented, would be measured by the number of gun violence related deaths in the United

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<sup>76</sup> BBC News. "America's gun culture in charts." August 5, 2019. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-41488081>

<sup>77</sup> BBC News. "US gun control: What is the NRA and why is it so powerful?" August 6, 2020. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-35261394>

<sup>78</sup>NRA. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NRA. Accessed: February 15, 2021: <https://home.nra.org/about-the-nra/>

States after the implementation of the *Gun Safety Reform Act*. If successful, there would be a decline in gun violence related deaths from the year 2020.

The policy would state that, “Individuals must adhere to strict background checks to obtain a permit, without which, they would not be able to purchase a gun. The individual must be at least 21 years old to acquire a permit.” A “Gun Safety Reform Act” would have to be legislated by Congress to ensure all Americans who want to buy guns have strict background checks (including criminal and psychological assessments) after which they would obtain a gun permit, and only then, would they be able to purchase a gun.

As reported by the Committee on the Judiciary, states with tough gun laws have far less gun violence than states with weak gun laws.<sup>79</sup> A study done by the Centre of American Progress found that states with the weakest gun laws (e.g. Alaska, Arizona, Missouri, Kansas, etc) had three times more gun violence than the states with the toughest gun laws (e.g. California, Maryland, Hawaii, New York, etc).<sup>80</sup> If gun laws like those in the states with tough gun laws are federally regulated nationwide, it can make an influence on gun violence related deaths and decrease gun violence as a whole.<sup>81</sup> Hence, if the proposed *Gun Safety Reform Act* is successful once legislated, it would mean there would be a significant drop in gun violence and gun-violence related deaths nationwide.

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<sup>79</sup> Committee on the Judiciary. States With Weak Gun Laws Suffer From More Gun Violence. September 24, 2019. Accessed: March 16, 2021: <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/dem/releases/states-with-weak-gun-laws-suffer-from-more-gun-violence#:~:text=A%20study%20by%20the%20Center,Connecticut%2C%20New%20Jersey%2C%20Maryland%2C>

<sup>80</sup> Parsons, Chelsea, and Vargas Eugenio. America Under Fire. Centre for American Progress. October 11, 2016. Accessed: March 16, 2021: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/reports/2016/10/11/145830/america-under-fire/>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

### *Policy Implementation Tool*

The *Gun Safety Reform Act* would be a form of regulatory enforcement, and hence a regulation, once the law is passed. The Act would require the federal government to regulate the distribution of guns and who gets them based on their in-depth criminal and psychological records. The *Gun Safety Reform Act* would be regulated by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Although the policy would be enforced on all Americans, it would specifically target those with a history of criminality, violence, and notable mental health illnesses that deem them unsuitable and unsafe to own a gun, as they would be highly unlikely to get a gun. Private and public sellers would not be able to sell guns without receiving state-approved gun permits, as per federal guidelines. For gun acquisition, an individual would have to apply for a gun permit which would include a form that would get their personal details, medical history, fingerprints, and would process their background check and conduct it electronically. Next, a psychological assessment would be done by a federally approved licensed psychologist to determine whether the individual is mentally fit to own a firearm. The individual would be given a list of federally approved licensed psychologists who can conduct a psychological assessment and would pay the fee of \$100 for it. Once the psychologist conducts a psychological assessment and they deem the individual psychologically fit as per federal guidelines, the individual would get a positive psychological assessment and would be a step closer to getting their permit. If the person is denied a clearance, they can file an appeal. If they can demonstrate at a later time that they are psychologically fit to own a gun, they can get another psychological assessment done at a later date. To get the permit, the individual would have to wait at least 14 days to ensure there is enough time to do all the background checks in detail. It would also allow

for a waiting period that would help the individual to cool down and not act impulsively had they acquired the gun earlier. Once the individual gets the permit, they would be able to purchase a gun.

However, if an individual acquires a gun without a permit, it would be classified as a class b felony. The individual would face a year in state prison as the permits are state-approved (following federal guidelines) and would be dealt with by the state. Along with federal and state funding, saving billions of dollars due to gun violence can help assist in regulating and assisting laws that aim to prevent gun violence. For example, money saved can be budgeted to go towards resources and staff needed to complete more in-depth background checks and psychological assessments.

### *Policy Authorization Tool*

The purpose of the *Gun Safety Reform Act* is not to repeal or amend the Second Amendment thereby infringing the rights of gun acquisition for Americans. It is to simply regulate the gun acquisition and allow suitable individuals, as defined by federal guidelines, to own firearms. A legislative law must be enacted to ensure regulatory enforcement is in place. Gun control is a sensitive topic that is often opposed by gun advocates and owners. A legislative law would be deemed more credible and accepted by the public as it would entail a time-consuming process of the proposed law to be analyzed, addressed, voted on, and eventually passed by Congress. Although it would take time to enact this law, once passed and enacted, it would strengthen the *Gun Safety Reform Act* and most likely stay enacted for a longer period of time as a change in the legislation would require time as well.

A bill to introduce the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would first be proposed after gaining the support of Representatives and introduced in the US House of Representatives. Once the bill reaches the House Committee on Oversight and Reform in Congress, the bill would be reviewed and voted upon. The committee would approve the bill and it would be further debated upon by the House of Representatives and eventually voted on and sent to Senate. Lastly, the bill would be approved by the Senate and eventually Congress and the President.

## **Policy Analysis**

Gun control is an area of controversy with both opponents and supporters. Although the implementation of the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would have upsides, it would also have its downsides.

The *Gun Safety Reform Act* is essentially a licensing law that requires an individual to acquire a permit to purchase a gun. If the policy is implemented, there is a strong possibility that there would be a decline in homicide rates caused by gun violence compared to the statistics of 2020. States that passed licensing laws and required permits for gun acquisition show a significant reduction in both gun homicides and gun suicides.<sup>82</sup> It was reported that in 1995, Connecticut passed a law that required individuals to obtain a permit before acquiring a gun, their gun homicide rate decreased by 40%<sup>83</sup> and their gun suicide rate also declined by 15%;

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<sup>82</sup> Crifasi, Cassandra., Meyers., Johns, and Webster, Daniel. Effects of changes in permit-to-purchase handgun laws in Connecticut and Missouri on suicide rates. *Preventative Medicine*, 79 (2015): 43-49.

<sup>83</sup> Rudolph, Kara., Stuart, Elizabeth., Vernick, Jon., and Webster, Daniel, "Association Between Connecticut's Permit-to-purchase Handgun Law and Homicides," *American Journal of Public Health*, 105-8 (2015): 49-54.

these rates consistently declined over the years.<sup>84</sup> However, when Missouri rescinded their licensing law in 2007, the gun homicide rate of Missouri increased by 25%<sup>85</sup> whereas their gun suicide rate increased by 16%;<sup>86</sup> these rates consistently increased over the years.<sup>8788</sup> Hawaii has the least gun deaths per 100,000 people out of all 50 states.<sup>89</sup> Hawaii is one of the states with the strictest gun laws and requires a state-approved license to acquire and carry a gun (as shown in figure A below); carrying a gun without a license is a class B felony.<sup>90</sup> As displayed by the research, gun licensing laws have a positive impact on gun related homicides, and it is likely that the implementation of a licensing law like the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would result in a decline in gun homicides.

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<sup>84</sup> Giffords Law Centre. Licensing. Accessed March 28, 2021: <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/owner-responsibilities/licensing/>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Webster, Daniel., Crifasi, Cassandra., and Vernick, Jon. “Effects of the Repeal of Missouri’s Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides,” *Journal of Urban Health*. 91- 2 (2014): 293–302.

<sup>89</sup> Vargas, Eugenio. Gun Violence in America: A State-by-State Analysis. *Centre for American Progress*. November 20, 2019. Accessed: March 28, 2021: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/guns-crime/news/2019/11/20/477218/gun-violence-america-state-state-analysis/>

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Concealed Carry Association. Hawaii. September 3, 2020. Accessed: March 28, 2021: [https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/resources/ccw\\_reciprocity\\_map/hi-gun-laws/#:~:text=Hawaii%20permits%20open%20carry%20and,is%20a%20class%20B%20felony.](https://www.usconcealedcarry.com/resources/ccw_reciprocity_map/hi-gun-laws/#:~:text=Hawaii%20permits%20open%20carry%20and,is%20a%20class%20B%20felony.)

## State Licensing Requirements for Gun Purchase or Possession

State	Type of Firearms	Type of License	Safety Training or Exam Requirement	Duration
California <sup>13</sup> Nebraska <sup>14</sup>	All firearms Handguns	Firearms Safety Permit to purchase	Yes No	5 years <sup>14</sup> 3 years
New Jersey <sup>25</sup>	All firearms	Permit to purchase <sup>26</sup>	No	So long as eligible (long guns)  90 days (handguns) <sup>27</sup>
New York <sup>28</sup>	Handguns	License to own	No	5 years
North Carolina <sup>29</sup>	Handguns	Permit to purchase	No	5 years
Rhode Island <sup>30</sup>	Handguns	Permit to purchase	Yes	Unspecified
Washington <sup>31</sup>	Semiautomatic rifles	Firearms safety certification	Yes	5 years
Massachusetts <sup>21</sup>	All firearms and ammunition devices	License to own	Yes	6 years
		Permit to purchase	Yes	10 days

Figure B -

*States that require permit to purchase/own a gun.<sup>91</sup>*

The immediate purchase and ownership of a gun can lead to people acting on temporary impulses and emotions — such as committing suicide or murder.<sup>92</sup> Studies showed that waiting period laws reduced gun homicides by 17% and gun suicide by 7-11%.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, evidence shows that states that have longer waiting periods have fewer incidents of gun violence, such as Hawaii, Maryland, and California.<sup>94</sup> Hawaii has a 14 day waiting period and California and the District of Columbia have a 10 day waiting period before they can acquire their gun permit; these

<sup>91</sup> Giffords Law Centre. Licensing. Accessed March 28, 2021: <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/owner-responsibilities/licensing/>

<sup>92</sup> Giffords Law Centre. Waiting Periods. Accessed: March 28, 2021, <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/gun-sales/waiting-periods/>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

states also have few of the lowest gun violence related deaths in the country.<sup>95</sup> The RAND Corporation did not find any studies that showed waiting period laws increased the possibility of gun-violence related deaths or crime.<sup>96</sup> However, their research also showed a decrease in gun suicide and gun-violence related deaths.<sup>97</sup> Including a 14-day waiting period policy within the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would be effective as it would allow for a cooling down period and may prevent impulsive gun homicides and gun suicides. It would also allow for enough time for the individual to get a psychological assessment and an in-depth background check before they get their gun permit.

According to the Democratic staff of the Joint Economic Committee, gun violence costs America \$229 billion annually — \$49 billion alone go to the lost wages and economic contributions of the victims and imprisoned perpetrators, \$2.8 billion are spent on gunshot wounds in hospital bills, and long-term prison costs for people with crime using guns cost \$5.2 billion per year.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, gun violence reduces the growth rate of businesses — for example, in Minneapolis, each gun homicide in a certain year resulted in 80 fewer jobs within the neighbourhood the next year.<sup>99</sup> Hence, gun violence related deaths and gun violence in general place an economic strain on the US economy.<sup>100</sup> According to a study, in Washington DC, every 10 fewer gun violence incidents are strongly related to the creation of 20 more jobs,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> RAND Corporation. The Effects of Waiting Periods. April 22, 2020. Accessed: March 28, 2021: <https://www.rand.org/research/gun-policy/analysis/waiting-periods.html>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Joint Economic Committee Democrats. America Can't Afford Gun Violence. Accessed: March 29, 2021: [https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/a8c89469-30a1-4b88-b3f5-0c5e54ad5df0/economic-impact-of-gun-violence-final.pdf](https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/a8c89469-30a1-4b88-b3f5-0c5e54ad5df0/economic-impact-of-gun-violence-final.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



one new business opening, and one less business closure.<sup>101</sup> Washington DC is one of the states with stricter gun laws.<sup>102</sup> Current policies are not decreasing the costs of gun violence; in fact, they have gone up over the years.<sup>103</sup> Previously noted statistics indicate that stricter gun laws — such as obtaining a gun permit — on a federal level may reduce gun-violence related deaths, therefore decreasing the gun violence costs. The costs saved by the decrease of gun violence can be used for purchasing technology and softwares to expand and improve the background screening process done to acquire a gun permit.

Many acts of gun violence occur during periods of extreme emotional distress and approximately 60% of gun-violence related deaths are suicide.<sup>104</sup> For example, suicide is linked to psychiatric disorders and those individuals are at a higher risk of committing gun suicide.<sup>105</sup> It was noted that household gun ownership in America is a significant factor that contributes towards a heightened risk of suicide.<sup>106</sup> Thus, psychological evaluations would help prevent guns from being acquired by those who are mentally unfit and are at a higher risk of causing harm to themselves or those around them.<sup>107</sup> It was found that delaying access by implementing waiting periods and extensive background checks significantly reduced suicide, particularly in the older population.<sup>108</sup> Some mass shootings have also been attributed to individuals who had mental

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<sup>101</sup> Urban Institute. Economic Impacts of Gun Violence. Accessed: March 29, 2021: <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/justice-policy-center/projects/economic-impacts-gun-violence>

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> American Psychological Association. Preventing Gun Violence. Accessed: March 29, 2021: <https://www.apa.org/advocacy/gun-violence/misperceptions.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> Swanson, Jeffrey., McGinty, Elizabeth., Fazel, Seena., and Mays, Vickie. Mental illness and reduction of gun violence and suicide: bringing epidemiologic research to policy. *Annals of Epidemiology*. 25-5 (2015): 366-376.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

illnesses, such as Adam Lanza who supposedly had schizophrenia and was responsible for the tragic Sandy Hook elementary school shooting in Connecticut.<sup>109</sup> According to studies, approximately 60% of perpetrators of mass shootings since 1970 in the US showcased symptoms of delusions, acute paranoia, and depression before committing acts of gun violence.<sup>110</sup> Individuals that show violent tendencies should not have access to guns and should be under psychiatric attention as they may be able to prevent these crimes.<sup>111</sup> Hence, psychological assessments may help determine who is better fit to acquire a gun permit to obtain a gun and would be able to reduce gun suicides.

However, mass shootings account for less than 1% of all gun-violence related deaths in America.<sup>112</sup> According to a study, the overall contribution of people with serious mental disorders to gun violence crimes is less than 3%.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that laws that focus on a population that represents less than 3% of gun violence would be ineffective and low yield, and also wasteful of resources.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, a study claims that mass shootings caused by the actions of those who are “mentally ill” have little predictive and preventative validity as a psychiatrist may report the level of mental illness a person has, but cannot accurately predict if they are at risk of hurting others and can cause an act of gun violence such as mass shootings.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, there is no specific data that suggests whether a psychological assessment would

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<sup>109</sup> Metzl, Jonathan, and MacLeish, Kenneth. Mental Illness, Mass Shootings, and the Politics of American Firearms. *American Journal of Mental Health*. 105-2 (2015). 240-249.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Knoll, James., and Annas, George. Mass Shootings and Mental Illness. American Psychiatric Association. (2016). 81-103.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Swanson, Jeffrey. Explaining rare acts of violence: the limits of evidence from population research. *Psychiatr Serv*. 62-11 (2011). 1369-1371.

help decrease the number of gun-related homicides as there is no clear link between mental health problems and gun violence.<sup>116</sup> The majority of people with mental health disorders do not commit violent crimes and most violent offenders are not mentally ill.<sup>117</sup> Psychological assessments could be subjective as they are determined by the mental health professional — thus, they can overlook or underdiagnose a mental illness or they may not deem someone as capable of committing a violent act whereas the person may end up committing a mass shooting.<sup>118</sup> Essentially, psychological assessments may not be an efficient way to determine who is capable of harming others and might not decrease the number of gun homicides significantly.

### **Political Analysis**

During your tenure as a member of the US House, you have advocated against gun violence and the deaths caused by it.<sup>119</sup> You supported gun safety reforms such as the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993 and several bills after that to prevent gun violence.<sup>120</sup> In one of your recent press release statements, you recognized the surge of gun violence related deaths in 2020 and stated, “With gun deaths and gun sales surging in 2020, we must act now to meaningfully combat gun violence. We know of the commonsense solutions like the need for better and more robust background checks and the need to renew the assault weapons ban, but we must also seek other solutions. And we do that by studying gun violence like the public

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<sup>116</sup> Vitelli, Romeo. Who Should Own A Gun?. *Psychology Today*. August 3, 2015. Accessed: March 30, 2021: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/media-spotlight/201508/who-should-own-gun>

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney. Gun Safety. Accessed: April 12, 2021: <https://maloney.house.gov/issues/gun-safety>

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

health crisis it is.”<sup>121</sup> In 2019, Senator Markey and yourself helped secure \$25 million to fund research for gun violence at the CDC.<sup>122</sup> As per your advocacy for gun control, you have received support for your legislation from several pro-gun control groups such as Stop Hand Gun Violence, March for Our Lives, Brady: United Against Gun Violence, Everytown for Gun Safety, CeaseFire PA, North Carolinians Against Gun Violence, States United to Prevent Gun Violence, States United to Prevent Gun Violence, Rhode Island Coalition Against Gun Violence, Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence, Women Against Gun Violence (CA), Arizonans for Gun Safety, Iowans for Gun Safety, Hoosiers Concerned About Gun Violence, Michigan Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence, Colorado Ceasefire, Gun Sense NH, a project of Granite State Progress, Gun Violence Prevention Center of Utah, MOKS Grandparents Against Gun Violence, Ohio Coalition Against Gun Violence, Safe Tennessee Project, Wisconsin Anti-Violence Effort Educational Fund, and Women Against Gun Violence.<sup>123</sup> According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre, in 2019, 60% of Americans believe there should be stricter gun laws.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, 90% of Americans are in favour of universal background checks, including yourself as you stated that background checks should be conducted on every gun sale.<sup>125</sup> It is highly likely that the gun safety groups listed above who supported your previous legislation for gun safety would support the *Gun Safety Reform Act* as well as several Americans who support gun safety. Thus, the *Gun Safety Reform Act* proposed, if passed, has the possibility to increase your support and help gain votes for your next electoral term in 2023.

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<sup>121</sup>Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney. Rep. Maloney, Sen. Markey Reintroduce Bill to Fund Gun Violence Prevention Research at the CDC. February 4, 2021. Accessed: April 12, 2021: <https://maloney.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-maloney-sen-markey-reintroduce-bill-to-fund-gun-violence-0>

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Treisman, Rachel. Poll: Number Of Americans Who Favor Stricter Gun Laws Continues To Grow. *National Public Radio*. October 20, 2019. Accessed: April 12, 2021: <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/20/771278167/poll-number-of-americans-who-favor-stricter-gun-laws-continues-to-grow>

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

However, there would be significant opposition from pro-gun organizations like the NRA and the Second Amendment Foundation. The implementation of a 14 day waiting period before a gun could be acquired would come with a significant amount of opposition from pro-gun supporters and associations like the NRA.<sup>126</sup> The NRA already made claims that the federal firearm-tracing data of 2018 showed that the average time between the first retail sale of a gun and committing an act of violence was approximately 9 years.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, they noted that background checks are also received within a short period and do not need 14 days to be processed.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, the Second Amendment Foundation Founder, Alan Gottlieb said, “A right delayed is a right denied,” thereby stating that waiting periods violate the second amendment.<sup>129</sup> Thus, if the *Gun Safety Reform Act* is implemented, it would result in a strong protest by pro-gun supporters and may be difficult to make it an effective permanent or long-term law.

58% of Americans agree with the fact that gun ownership leads to more safety and 32% of Americans oppose gun-control organizations.<sup>130</sup> Gun rights supporters and advocacy groups like the NRA claimed that stricter background checks would mean sacrificing an individual’s constitutional rights and may violate the Second Amendment as it would give the government

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<sup>126</sup> Whitehurst, Lindsay. Gun waiting periods rare in US states but more may be coming. ABC News. March 21, 2021. Accessed: March 30, 2021: <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/states-look-gun-waiting-periods-shootings-76590599>

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> NRA-ILA. Waiting Periods. Accessed: March 30, 2021: <https://www.nraila.org/get-the-facts/waiting-periods/>

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Murray, Mark. Poll: 58 percent say gun ownership increases safety. NBC News. March 23, 2018. Accessed: March 31, 2021: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/poll-58-percent-say-gun-ownership-increases-safety-n859231>

the power to regulate gun acquisition.<sup>131</sup> Essentially, the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would encourage gun control and would mean that there would be a tradeoff of liberty of Americans as the government would get to decide and regulate who gets guns.

Gun-related issues often have significant partisan divides, especially when proposing stricter gun laws.<sup>132</sup> Although Democrats in Congress have called for expanding background checks and more restrictive gun laws, Republicans have widely opposed those proposals.<sup>133</sup> To pass the *Gun Safety Reform Act* in Congress, it is likely that votes from at least 10 Republican senators would be required which Congress has not been able to get in the past decade.<sup>134</sup> In 2019, 86% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents were in favour of stricter gun laws, whereas only 31% of Republican leaners and Republicans were in favour of them.<sup>135</sup> However, over the years there has been a 7% increase in support of stricter gun laws amongst Republicans and an 11% rise amongst Democrats.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, when discussing gun-related policies, the general public overall agrees with certain areas.<sup>137</sup> For example, 91% of Democrats and 92% of Republicans strongly believe in barring people with mental illnesses from buying

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<sup>131</sup> Malloy, Allie. Trump says he believes NRA will ‘get there’ on background checks. CNN. August 9, 2019. Accessed: March 31, 2021: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/09/politics/trump-nra-comments-background-checks/index.html>

<sup>132</sup> Schaeffer, Katherine. Share of Americans who favor stricter gun laws has increased since 2017. *Pew Research Centre*. October 16, 2019. Accessed: April 12, 2021: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/16/share-of-americans-who-favor-stricter-gun-laws-has-increased-since-2017/>

<sup>133</sup> Shabad, Rebecca. Biden calls on Congress to tighten gun laws in wake of Colorado shooting that killed 10. NBC News. March 23, 2021. Accessed: April 19, 2021: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/unfathomable-pain-democrats-demand-action-gun-control-after-back-back-n1261797>

<sup>134</sup> The Conversation. Gun control fails quickly in Congress after each mass shooting, but states often act – including to loosen gun laws. March 25, 2021. Accessed April 19, 2021: <https://theconversation.com/gun-control-fails-quickly-in-congress-after-each-mass-shooting-but-states-often-act-including-to-loosen-gun-laws-157746>

<sup>135</sup> Schaeffer, Katherine. Share of Americans who favor stricter gun laws has increased since 2017. *Pew Research Centre*. October 16, 2019. Accessed: April 12, 2021: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/16/share-of-americans-who-favor-stricter-gun-laws-has-increased-since-2017/>

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

guns.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, 93% of Democrats and 82% of Republicans are in favour of requiring background checks for private gun sales and sales at gun shows.<sup>139</sup> Thus, it is possible for the *Gun Safety Reform Act* to pass because the main purpose of the act is to require a psychological assessment and thorough background check to acquire a permit for gun purchasing.

The support for stricter gun laws also varies by the demographics of individuals. In 2019, 55% of men and 64% of women favoured stricter gun laws.<sup>140</sup> 72% of college graduates were in favour of stricter gun laws, whereas 55% of people with no college degrees were in favour of them.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, 64% of individuals within the age range of 18-29 favoured stricter gun laws, 60% between the ages 30-49, 56% between the ages of 50-64, and 62% of individuals that were 65+ favoured supported the idea of stricter gun laws.<sup>142</sup> According to statistics, republican men between the ages of 50-64 are more likely to oppose gun laws as they are in favour of gun rights.<sup>143</sup> However, in most cases, the majority of individuals across all demographics support stricter gun laws which increase the likelihood of support for the *Gun Safety Reform Act*.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives regulates gun laws and Acting Director Regina Lombardo supports gun safety and has made firearms-related investigations a

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Treisman, Rachel. Poll: Number Of Americans Who Favor Stricter Gun Laws Continues To Grow. *National Public Radio*. October 20, 2019. Accessed: April 12, 2021: <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/20/771278167/poll-number-of-americans-who-favor-stricter-gun-laws-continues-to-grow>

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

priority.<sup>144</sup> During her time leading the ATF, the Department of Justice reported that they charged more than 14,200 defendants crimes related to firearms during 2020.<sup>145</sup> “Protecting the public from violent crime involving firearms is at the core of ATF’s mission,” said the ATF’s Acting Director Regina Lombardo.<sup>146</sup> Thus, it is likely that ATF’s Acting Director would support the *Gun Safety Reform Act* and would help regulate the law once it passes as it aligns with her goals and the ATF’s mission as well. In essence, it is likely that the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would pass and also be effective. Although you and the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would gain support and the success of the legislation being passed would increase the number of voters for your next electoral term, it is likely that the attempt to pass this law would garner opposition from stakeholders such as the NRA and other gun-support organizations as well as Republicans that are in favour of gun rights.

## **Recommendation**

I recommend that you take action as soon as possible to adopt this proposal. Many individuals have lost their loved ones from the violent acts committed by guns and preventing gun-violence related deaths has become the need of the hour. As noted earlier in the proposal, gun violence and gun-violence related deaths are increasing nationwide, and implementing the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would decrease the gun homicide rates from 2020. Essentially, it would

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<sup>144</sup> Ward, Jessika. DOJ: More than 14,200 defendants charged with crimes related to firearms in Fiscal Year 2020. *ABC News*. October 13, 2020. Accessed: April 13, 2020: <https://www.mysuncoast.com/2020/10/13/doj-more-than-defendants-charged-with-crimes-related-firearms-fiscal-year/>

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.



help curtail several security risks that the United States is exposed to due to the easy accessibility of guns.

Although the implementation of the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would be faced with serious opposition from the majority of Republicans and gun rights groups — like the NRA, it is likely that you would garner a significant amount of support from the Democrats in Congress, the general Democratic population, and pro-gun control organizations. Moreover, the advantages of the policy outweigh the disadvantages since the main disadvantage would be getting significant opposition from Republicans within Congress and nationally. If the *Gun Safety Reform Act* is passed and results in a decline of gun-related deaths, including gun homicides and suicides, that would mean that it is a successful policy. According to the statistics presented in this proposal, it is likely that legislating the *Gun Safety Reform Act* would, in fact, prove to be successful. Not only would it result in a decline in gun-related deaths, but it would also decrease the costs of gun violence nationally and would benefit the economy of the United States. Thus, I believe that the *Gun Safety Reform Act* has multiple benefits and would be beneficial for the United States' security and economy — therefore, this policy proposal should be adopted.

## **Curriculum Vita**

Rameesha Syeda Ashfaq was born in September 1996 in Karachi, Pakistan. At the age of 3, she moved to Canada with her family where she has been living since then, and is a proud Pakistani-Canadian citizen. Rameesha attended Canada's renowned McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, where she graduated in 2019 with an Honours Bachelor of Arts in Social Psychology. During her time at McMaster University, she worked at their Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition and was also a teaching assistant for the Department of Social Psychology. Shortly after graduating from McMaster University, she started working for the Federal Government of Canada under their border control and immigration sector. Currently, Rameesha is completing her Masters of Arts in Public Management at the Johns Hopkins University. She is interested in foreign relations, public relations, and project management of non-profit organizations; she hopes to continue to pursue a career that aligns with her interests.